<u>INDIAN PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION</u>

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Normally we know education as a science and an art. We recognise it as a body of principles governing teaching or a system of rules determining the practice of those principles. But we do not suspect that there can be a philosophy of education. The fact is that the general spirit of the times is empirical, and, therefore, we feel more interested in facts and their control and manipulation. The first and the last premises of things, their basic relations and essential qualities appear to us as intangible and less real. But these are, in fact, the fundamental determinations and upon them depends the character of the concrete facts. An educational system always reflects a particular view of human personality and of the world. And these lend a character to each detail of the system. The concept of child nature that Frobel had, was the most important determining factor in the educational processes of his kindergarten and there is an evident relation between Montessori's view of the child and the method of instruction she elaborated. A philosophy is, therefore, always present in an educational system or a method and approach of teaching and instruction. And it pervasively influences the practice of education. It is evidently an advantage to know clearly what the philosophy of a particular scheme or system of education is. We can then check it up, modify and evolve our educational principles and practice in a conscious and a coherent manner.

Our present-day educational situation in the country is an interesting illustration of the need and value of philosophy to education. The educational system, which the British gave, we find more or less as inescapable. We can reform it here and there, but basically it remains the

same. This is the best thing that we can have—perhaps the present-day world standards are such—and yet we feel deeply dissatisfied. We feel that there is not much real education anywhere. How rarely do we see a man of education, of seeking, of true love of learning, of humility and culture.

The dissatisfaction appears enigmatic to ourselves. But that is due to the fact that our contemporary education represents and embodies the philosophy of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment movements of Europe. These have today become pervasive and constitute practically the view and the way of life of the world as a whole. Its principal values are mind and rationality, utility, science, organisation and success. Our education, on the whole, follows and represents the world standards of today. This represents the best judgment of the world and is intimately bound with the needs of the present life. Therefore we cannot escape it and this is the best thing that we can have. But with it we accept and live out its philosophy too, its view and values of life. On the other hand, we carry in ourselves, as inheritors of Indian culture, a view and way of life, which has its own values. These are the spirit, its deeper joys and qualities, selflessness, service, devotion, love, etc. We are clearly conscious neither of the one philosophy nor the other, neither that of the education we accept and enforce nor that of our traditional national life. Is it surprising then that we find our present education almost inescapable or the best that we can think of and have and yet feel deeply dissatisfied with it? Evidently, if this discord of our life is to be made good, we have first to become conscious of the warring philosophies of our soul. If we do not, we cannot escape the consequences of an inner war and conflict.

The significance of the philosophy to education is, therefore, fundamental. The philosophy gives to an educational system its basic values, its primary goals of life, its essential relations of existence,

truth and ultimate reality, i.e., we must philosophise in and on education.

Already in the field of science itself the need and the necessity of philosophisation has made itself felt. As science has advanced, fact-collecting has given place to finding explanations. It has now reached such a stage that the empirical science of modern physics has almost become a philosophy of material existence. There science and philosophy have tended to become indistinguishably one. In some other sciences too the urge for explanation is pressing them forward into philosophy. This development could have been, in fact, foreseen. After all, the phenomenal reality and the ultimate existence are not two compartments apart. They both constitute a single reality and to understand any part of it well and thoroughly we must know the whole of it. Unless we see a part in relation to the whole, how can we really know it?

The Indian tradition did divide knowledge into many 'vidyas', sciences and arts. But the empirical facts were never separated from the ultimate reality. Whether it was Grammar or Ayurveda or even Dancing, the particular discipline always attempted to discover its proper foundation in the ultimate. That is how a unity of knowledge was constantly maintained and the first and last premises of a science were kept consciously present to a student.

In the West the classification of sciences has tended to separate them artificially. It has created over-specialisation and a lack of perspective almost everywhere. It has certainly served the ends of division of labour and thereby promoted advance. But today a most serious problem of western knowledge is the recovery of a proper unity and perspective. And hence the idea of 'the whole' is commanding a great deal of attention at the hands of the philosophers as well as scientists. It is, at times, argued that knowledge has now advanced so much that it is impossible for any one person to possess it all and,

therefore, a synthesisation of its branches in a unity is impossible. Undoubtedly, it is so. But the real trouble is perhaps not due to the fact that knowledge has advanced so much, but rather to the separation of the empirical from the ultimate. The facts are infinite and extremely varied, but the ultimate reality as the basis of them all is one. A correlation, coordination and harmonisation of the knowledge of facts by themselves is an extremely difficult undertaking. But in and through the ultimate reality the varied sciences can be truly comprehended, because there all facts are really united. The Indian approach to knowledge avowedly insisted on knowing the ultimate in order that the empirical may be fully known and properly controlled. And that gave to it a greater power of perspective and integration. The same approach now needs to be developed with regard to modern western knowledge in order that it may be effectively controlled and canalised to serve the good of man.

Education, as we practice it, is a western science and as a science too rather a young and immature science. Psychology has given to it some insight, which makes education much surer of its processes than it used to be. But psychology itself is an infant science and it is not very sure of the true nature and constitution of human personality. A Jung affirms "All the usual little remedies and medicaments of psychology fall somewhat short (to explain personality) just as they do with the man of genius or the creative human being."[1] And a Gardner Murphy observes "Nobody knows anything much about the nature of man. We are in a position to raise a great many questions, to raise questions perhaps so grave and so fundamental that we begin to wonder if we even have a method for approaching an ultimate solution."[2]

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1. The Integration of Personality, p.299.
2. Main Currents in Modern Thought, Vol.9, No.2.

Evidently we must subject our education, its different schemes and plans and all its varied processes to a careful and deep scrutiny of thought, with a view to relate them to true truths of human nature and of reality. That is to say seek with a keen and special interest the first and the last premises of our educational ideas. The power of the un expressed premises is always very great. The assumptions predetermine a whole line of thought and action. Therefore, they must be specially taken care of. They constitute the philosophy of education and we cannot afford to let it work as an unknown force.

The Indian approach to all knowledge has been essentially philosophical or metaphysical or that of going to the very truth and foundation of a matter. And if we consider Indian culture as a whole, its vitality, its creativity, its capacity to produce geniuses, its conception of the ascending Ashramas or stages of life, we cannot escape the inference that education must have been a very deep interest of the leaders of India n life. All life, appears to have been conceived as education. An individual learns not only when he lives at the Gurukula, and pursues a course of discipline and instructions, but also when he becomes householder and undertakes the normal responsibilities of life. This is intended progressively to elevate his normal propensities through exercise, enjoyment and discipline to ~~a higher stage of greater discipline and a richer~~ a higher cultural life and finally to one of completest dedication to the very highest in life and culture. The castes were perhaps originally a functional classification on the basis of, as the Gita says, <u>Guna</u> and <u>Swabhava</u>, the traits and the characteristic nature of personality. The society, as a whole, was then conceived in consideration of the status of growth of individuals which implied an incentive to rise to higher levels of ~~growth~~ living. The idea of the <u>adhikarbheda</u>, which was so widely used in Indian life, implied a distinctive appreciation for an individual's ~~particular~~ level of growth and education then implied an indefinitely long span of time, so that different incarna-

tions were conceived as so many rungs in the ladder of an individual's ascension to salvation or spiritual freedom. The individual then realised himself, his soul, and became an illumined person, which is the highest status in the long course of the growth of human personality. Such a person knows, truly knows, truth and existence too. That is the status of the knowing person envisaged by Indian education. One knows, when one knows the reality in himself and the reality in the world. He has then in his grasp the unity, which commands and controls the multiplicity of the world and therefore possesses the true perspective of existence. He is then a free person, because identified with the unitary spiritual principle he is not confused and lost in the facts of the phenomenal existence.

There is no doubt that medieval spirituality rejected life and world and in that case naturally the question of a more effective manmgement of life through spirituality did not arise. But in fact the spirit is the unitary controlling principle of multiplicity and, therefore, in a fuller and proper view of spirituality a comprehensive control and direction of the phenomenal existence is a normal consequence of it.

These are some of the largest and the widest premises of Indian education. Within these premises, however, many strands and types of educational practices have appeared and flourished in the long history of Indian education. These have had their own further premises. The Upanishads give to us the earliest and fairly comprehens ive account of educational ideals and relations. We see the teacher, the taught, their mutual attitudes and relations, methods of teaching, personality and its highest ranges of growth, its aspiration for higher living and vivid perceptions of truth and reality. There we see a tradition of education, which gives us the deepest insights into personality, the nature of truth and the process of communication of knowledge and experience. This had perhaps set forth the high water mark of educational truths, which con-

tinued to influence in varying degrees the other traditions that came later on.

Another great tradition of Indian education was built up by the Buddhist Viharas. There we find a characteristic philosophy of its own, which is the application of the Buddhist view and way of life to education.

The Jain tradition has further been a conspicuous trend. The two epics give us their own standards of life and education. The Muslims brought to the country Arab learning and the great tradition which had nursed it. For a time a strong scholastic tradition had grown up, which yet persists in a measure. These and many more, good, bad and indifferent trends and traditions lived and prospered here.

Evidently education has been a great interest of Indian culture and quite large and varied has been our creation in this field. This creation had naturally proceeded from the premises of the [illegible] different forms had afforded us in our different historical situations some satisfaction. Today we do not entertain them for a revival, not even the best of them in the form it had existed. But the education that the modern world offers to us, the one that the Renaissance and Enlightenment movements of Europe and contemporary life have determined, also does not satisfy us. The problem that we confront is that of a synthesis between the modern education, its elaborate methods and materials, its organisation on the one hand, and the essence, the spirit, the philosophy of our traditional education, on the other. Our national soul cannot feel satisfied unless its most cherished values of life find in our present education a chance of exercise, growth and prosperity. A synthesis of the intrinsic values of truth, service, selflessness, soul and God has , therefore, to be attempted with those of utility, organisation and success.

This is the problem not only of India, but of all Asia. The traditional culture and sentiment assert themselves and yet they are under

a pressure to accept other values, which are a part of our present life and therefore possess a force of reality. These other values in themselves too do not satisfy. The problem, therefore, is a discreet and wise synthesis. It is interesting that these contemporary values in themselves too are in a state of crisis and under a heavy pressure of revaluation. The direction of revaluation too has become quite clearly expressed, even though a clear way of pursuit has not yet been made out. Scientists, philosophers and thinkers have repeatedly affirmed that intellectual values in the form of science, organisation and efficiency have been pursued too exclusively. They must be brought, they say, into intimate relation and harmony with the moral and spiritual values of life. The lag between science and morals, said Einstein, must be made up. The core of the traditional cultures of Asia is constituted of the moral and spiritual values and their problem actually is a preservation and reconciliation of the same with the values of science and technology. In fact the same persists as an unsolved problem of Europe too. The traditional culture there too had essentially emphasised moral and spiritual values. But there science had arisen in revolt against religion and ultimately prevailed upon it and therefore a proper reconciliation between the two was not achieved. Eastern traditions, in particular the Indian, do not know of any necessary opposition between them. Therefore, here a synthesis should be easier of achievement. And if the problem is recognised and squarely faced and the synthesis evolved it will mean not only a better and more correct guidance for our national life, but also an important contribution to the life of Europe and the West as a whole. Indian education can surely choose to be a representation of the general world education of today. But if it can attempt and synthesise the essential values of the Indian philosophy of education with the modern methods and materials of education, then a new quality in education could be produced, which may heartily satisfy us and also make a much needed contribution to the world education of today.

ಶ್ರೀ ಪೈ ಮದ್ರಾಸಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಬಿ. ಎ. ತರಗತಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಓದುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾಗ

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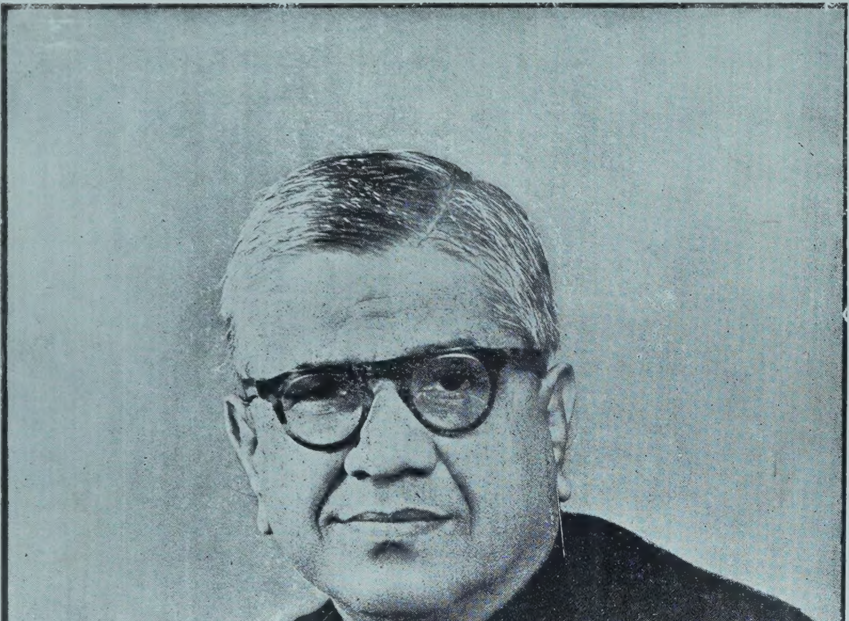
[ಜನನ: 5—10—1900. ಮರಣ: 12—3—1964.]

ಶ್ರೀ ಪೈ ತಮ್ಮ 25ನೇ ವಯಸ್ಸಿನಲ್ಲಿ



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